

23 August 1978

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

[REDACTED]
Soviet Strategic Forces Division
Office of Strategic Research

FROM: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Suggested Revisions to "The Role of Interdiction at Sea
in Soviet Naval Strategy and Operations"

[REDACTED]

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I have finally managed to read your excellent intelligence assessment, The Role of Interdiction at Sea in Soviet Naval Strategy and Operations. I am going to meet with the Secretary of the Navy in mid-September to discuss this study. I'd appreciate your attention to revising the study in the following directions:

a. I'd appreciate your utilizing the Turner definitions of naval missions rather than the pick-up group that are employed in the study, e.g., anti-submarine warfare is not an "output" or mission of navies; it is simply a tool for accomplishing some other mission. Terminology can lead to great confusion here.

b. Overall, I think your study attempts too much in the way of coming to a conclusion rather than explicating the problem. It focuses too much on what you think the expected outcome will be rather than laying out the reasons it may be that and the reasons it might be something else so that the reader can judge for himself where he thinks the truth in fact lies.

c. Accordingly, I would appreciate your considerably expanding the sensitivity checks. You admit that the work is a deliberate worst case study from the NATO point of view but you don't give us much to go on if we don't want to accept your worst case assumptions. I think there should be a lot more data in the study (which you undoubtedly did) that describes the sensitivity of the results if somewhat different assumptions are employed.

d. I question your measure of effectiveness. Survival of the total fleet of NATO merchant ships is not a cardinal output function in the event of general war. A better measure of effectiveness is cargoes delivered. This can perhaps most easily be expressed as a percentage of cargoes shipped. In short, I find figures like .6 percent of NATO flag ships sunk as a totally irrelevant measure. What does it mean to a policy-maker that he has lost .6, 6 or even 60 percent of NATO merchant shipping?

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e. Unless you can back it up more than is done in the study, I would question some of the categoric appraisals that are made, e.g., Page v, the Soviets believe the best way to interdict shipping is to conduct attacks on ports and harbors. In a non-nuclear war, I think this is simply a loser. Even though I happen to be an enthusiast and expert in mining, I don't think it is a very effective way to use submarines in interdiction. In short, I don't think the probable damage on harbors would warrant the use of air attacks, and mining of ports would be a poor utilization of submarines. That's a subjective judgment, I must admit.

f. On Page 3 you say the Soviets have not made preparations for effective interdiction operations. You don't indicate what preparations you think they would be taking. I am not sure how we would recognize it. Do you think the Japanese knew we were planning on that before World War II, or that we knew the Germans were planning on that? It's a very unproductive training exercise to send somebody out in the middle of the North Atlantic to try to simulate sinking a convoy. You are more likely to do it in training in home waters in the final stages of approach to and firing at a convoy.

g. On Page 4 I don't understand the phrase, "a limited ability to find merchant ships." I would have thought that one of the major changes from World War II, if there were a battle in the North Atlantic, would be the ready ability of the sea denial power to pinpoint where the convoys and important shipping were moving. Don't we give them any credit for having built a RORSAT?

h. On Page 5 you indicate that their submarines are specialized for ASW. Perhaps it's a parochial U.S. Navy view, but I have never considered their lack of attention to noise quieting as an indication that they were intent on hunting submarines with submarines. You also indicate that their submarines are built for anti-carrier operations but elsewhere you indicate that they feel it will take a lot of torpedo hits to sink a carrier, yet they are building submarines with small loads.

i. On Page 7 you talk about reliable evidence that the Soviets feel they'd need 80 to 100 nuclear subs or 320 to 400 diesels to take on NATO SSBNs in the Atlantic area. Where did you get that estimate? I think it's low.

j. On Page 9 and elsewhere you talk about a 60% availability of the Soviet submarine fleet. I think we must be consistent with our other intelligence assessment on Soviet military readiness. I believe it talks at least 70% and higher.

k. On Page 10 you talk about 10% of their submarines that are operationally ready being available because of other force commitment. Nowhere in the study do I find how you came to that calculation.

l. On Page 11 you assume that all the Soviet submarines travel 3,200 miles to get to their targets. I think that's a bit ridiculous. Even if all of our convoys take the southern route, no Soviet has to go more than 2,400 miles to come within the intercept range of any going to central Europe. If I were a Soviet, I doubt that I would go more than 1,800 miles and wait till they were closer to port.

m. I am rather skeptical of TABLE 3 and FIGURE 3. You show the aircraft coming out into the North Atlantic as having about a 1,300-mile radius, assuming they circumnavigate Norway, Finland and Sweden--which they are unlikely to do even if there are air defenses extant. You don't think about more than one refueling.

n. Returning to your measure of effectiveness, I think you should look at some other studies about how much shipping is likely to be around the North Atlantic in the event of war, not simply go to the normal peacetime figure of 3,200. There may be a substantial difference.

o. The Soviets may be concerned about the specter of U.S. carrier task groups in the Norwegian Sea and eastern Mediterranean. I have commanded in both of those areas and believe it would be a foolhardy action to move carriers into either area in the event of full-scale conventional hostility. This leads me to some skepticism as to whether the Soviet intentions will remain as rigid as you hypothesize, e.g., once we don't bring carriers and amphibious forces into the Norwegian Sea, they will certainly feel less constrained to hold back anti-carrier forces. I agree that in the Mediterranean they will concentrate on sinking our navies as their primary role, but they would be foolish to try to use more than the dozen or so submarines that will likely be on station (unless they capture the Dardanelles and can control the Aegean Sea).

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Attachment
Proposed Foreword

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Proposed Foreword for Revised Study
on the
Role of Interdiction at Sea in Soviet Naval Strategy and Operations

The DCI has reviewed this study and makes the following introductory comments.

There are two basic elements to the study. The first is: What are the Soviet intentions with respect to attempting sea denial in the North Atlantic? The second is: What are the Soviet capabilities to execute sea denial if they decided to do so?

With respect to intentions, I believe it is clear that planners on both the Warsaw Pact and NATO sides basically expect a short war. I therefore agree with the study that sea denial operations in the North Atlantic are not a high priority item for Soviet naval efforts in the initial stages of either a nuclear or conventional war between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. At the same time, in advance of both World War I and World War II, everyone expected that there would be a short war. In advance of each of these wars the Germans did not make explicit preparations for a war/sea denial. I therefore believe there is a high probability that if a war between the Warsaw Pact and NATO became an extended conventional conflict, the naval side of the war would turn into a protracted campaign of sea denial versus sea control in the North Atlantic. In short, there is reason to believe that this is not the Soviet intent today, but reason to be concerned that it may well become that intent if a war in which seaborne supply is a factor does evolve.

This means that the important part of the study is that concerning Soviet capabilities. Clearly if we establish that the Soviets do not have a substantial capability to conduct a sea denial campaign, this would have important implications. The initial study, in my opinion, did not bring out adequately the question of what the Soviet capabilities might be. Most specifically, it did not indicate the sensitivity of various assumptions so that the reader could better make his own assessment. This revised version attempts to correct that but there is still work to be accomplished. In my view, the recent intelligence assessment that Soviet submarines carry substantially smaller loads of torpedoes than had previously been assumed is a major factor mitigating against a Soviet capability to exercise sea denial. The study, however, does not adequately treat the offsetting factor of

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increased capability with radar and other satellites to locate convoys and make maximum utilization of submarine days at sea. The revised study attempts to show more results of varying the parameters of number of submarines employed and turn-around time. The original study also used an erroneous measure of effectiveness--the percentage of total NATO merchant fleet lost. A more meaningful effectiveness factor is the percentage of cargoes shipped that are in fact delivered. Much more work remains to be done in this area, most of it by the Department of Defense that has data on shipping requirements and availabilities.

In his response to the original study, the Director of Naval Intelligence offered to conduct a joint study effort to approach this problem in an even more systematic and thorough manner. I look forward to a joint Navy-CIA effort to do just that.

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